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SUBJECT: EU HEAD OF DELEGATION DISCUSSES UPCOMING PRAGUE  
MINISTERIAL TROIKA

Classified By: Ambassador William Wood for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: European Union (EU) Head of Delegation Ettore Sequi told the Ambassador during a January 26th meeting that a strong message needed to be sent supporting elections in Afghanistan, and any interim government (or continuation of President Karzai's term) until fall elections. He intended to urge Afghan Foreign Minister Spanta to request European Community (EC) elections observers, and the lifting of trade barriers/tariffs on products from Afghanistan and Western Pakistan as a way of revitalizing those economies.

UPCOMING MINISTERIAL TROIKA  
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12. (C) Sequi said he would be attending the Prague Ministerial troika on January 28th, and that he wanted to discuss messages that should be conveyed to the Afghans and the European Union. Sequi added that the EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Solana would not be attending the troika and had asked Sequi to represent him. Other attendees would include FM Spanta and the Czech Foreign Minister.

13. (C) Sequi noted that despite international support for September elections, some had hinted that an alternative to elections (one that would please Parliamentary opponents such as Deputy Speaker Qanooni) such as a Loya Jirga should be found to resolve the elections date dispute. Sequi added that President Karzai had told him that some Afghans believed there was a difference of opinion between the U.S. and UK on the efficacy of elections. Sequi asserted the international community should send a strong, unified message supporting elections.

14. (C) Sequi intended to urge Spanta to request EC elections observers to promote a credible election process. Sequi would also urge EU members to provide whatever support was necessary to ensure a successful election. The Italians were already considering sending carabinieri teams, and others in Brussels were considering similar support.

15. (C) Sequi wondered if Russia, with whom Speaker Qanooni apparently maintained close ties, could influence Qanooni to ease his opposition to a fall election date. Amb. Wood replied that the U.S. had informed Moscow that it would be happy for Russia to play a positive role in Afghanistan's future. However, Karzai had to be careful in cozying up to Russia, as many Afghans still equated Russia with the former Soviet Union.

16. (C) The Ambassador expressed strong support for elections in 2009, the later the better. Qanooni, the Ambassador added, did not seem to be seeking compromise, but rather confrontation with the Karzai government. Sequi noted that UNAMA's Deputy Chief of Mission Chris Alexander had met with several parliamentary leaders over the previous week, and learned that they were open to resolving the dispute and settling on a fall election date. Qanooni was not expected get sufficient support to force a May election, and would likely settle for the fall timing.

17. (C) The Ambassador told Sequi that one way to promote a regional approach to supporting Afghanistan would be for countries that traded with Afghanistan and Western Pakistan to lower or abolish import tariffs on products from those regions. Such actions by the international community could do much to promote growth and improve local economies. He added that the U.S. would not object to Spanta promoting that idea.

WOOD